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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR, KPAO, OIIP, OPRC, PGOV, PREL, PK

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-PAK RELATIONS; DESECRATION

OF THE HOLY QURAN; CAMPAIGN AGAINST TERRORISM; INDIA-

PAKISTAN RELATIONS; IRAQ: ANTI-INSURGENT OFFENSIVES;

IRAN: NUCLEAR PROGRAM; PAKISTAN POLITICAL SITUATION;

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AFGHANISTAN: SECURITY AND RECONSTRUCTION/DRUG TRADE

(May 26, 2005)

MR Highlights: Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca's meeting with Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz gets widespread coverage in today's papers. Country's largest Urdu daily, "Jang," runs this headline on its front-page: "Pakistan, U.S. Agree To Boost Defense, Economic Cooperation" (para 2). Another Urdu paper "Din" highlights the most heated issue of today and quotes Assistant Secretary as saying: "We Will Punish Those Who Desecrated the Holy Quran" (para 3). Papers, particularly the Urdu dailies, seem to contribute to the momentum religious and some political parties are trying to build for a protest day Friday (May 27) against the alleged desecration of the Quran. "Tomorrow Quran Bearing Protesters To Demonstrate In Every City" (para 10). While the reverberations of the alleged desecration of the Quran at Guantanamo Bay continue, another incident comes to the fore: "Muslims Protest Over American Church Displaying 'Quran Should Be Flushed' Slogan" (para 19). Realizing how niggling the issue of the alleged desecration of Quran is becoming for the U.S., the British High Commission tries to stay out of the trouble by issuing this statement: "Islam is a Great Religion; Muslims are not Terrorists; We Respect Quran Like we Respect the Bible; Desecration Was A Sad Incident," (para 13).

Commenting on the publication of the photographs showing Saddam Hussain in his underwear, leading English paper "The News" comments: "American officials will have to work overtime to manage the public-relations crisis they face around the world, which aggravated after the front-page publication by the British tabloid The Sun of Saddam Hussein's picture in his underpants," (para 36). End Highlights.

-- News Stories/U.S.-Pak Relations

1. "Rocca Assures U.S. Support To Pakistan" "Daily Times" (05/26)

Quote: Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca discussed defense, economic and trade relations and the regional situation on Wednesday. An official press statement said the prime minister expressed his satisfaction over the growing cooperation and close relations between the two

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countries. He welcomed the U.S. government's decision to sell F-16s aircraft to Pakistan. He said the delivery of the aircraft would help Pakistan meet its defense needs. The U.S. official assured the prime minister of continued U.S. cooperation in strengthening Pakistan's security and increasing economic relations between the two countries. Referring to relations with India, Aziz said that Pakistan remained committed to the composite dialogue process and believed the process was irreversible. He said that various confidence-building measures had contributed to improving the atmosphere.... Rocca said U.S. valued its relations with Pakistan, and praised Pakistan's role in the global war against terrorism. She welcomed Pakistan's assistance to Afghanistan and its positive role with respect to its

relations with India. Meanwhile, in a two-hour meeting between Rocca and Foreign Secretary Riaz M Khan on Wednesday, both sides vowed to bolster bilateral relations in defense, trade and commerce and to expedite efforts to stamp out terrorism and drug smuggling. Praising Pakistan's war on terrorism, Rocca said "the arrest of Al-Qaeda No 3 Abu-Faraj Al-Libbi and other senior leaders of the outfit are ample proof that Islamabad is pursuing an unflinching policy to flush out terrorism." She said Washington would maintain close cooperation and provide assistance to the government of Pakistan in fighting militancy and terrorism, fulfilling the country's defense-related requirements, and supporting President Musharraf's policy of enlightened moderation. Rocca will meet President Musharraf today (Thursday). End quote.

2. "Pakistan-U.S. Agree To Boost Defense, Economic Cooperation," "Jang" (05/26)

Quote: U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina Rocca, called on Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on Wednesday and discussed bilateral relations including defense, economic and trade matters. Both of them agreed to boost defense and economic relations between the two countries. Secretary Rocca and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz also discussed the Pak-U.S. relations, CBM's between India and Pakistan and situation in Afghanistan. End quote.

3. "We Will Punish Those Who Desecrated the Holy Quran: Christina Rocca," "Din" (05/26)

Quote: In her meeting with PM Shaukat Aziz U.S.

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Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca assured him that the U.S. in investigating allegations of desecration of the Holy Quran at Guantanamo Bay and action would be taken against perpetrators. End quote.

4. "Fazl Wants Exclusive Meeting With Rocca" "Dawn" (05/26)

Quote: The leader of Opposition in the National Assembly and secretary general Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) Maulana Fazlur Rahman, is expected to arrive in the federal capital on Thursday to meet U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca. When contacted for confirmation, Maulana Fazl, who is in D.I. Khan campaigning for the MMA candidate in a by-election, said: "Yes, I will try to be in Islamabad tomorrow (Thursday)". He, however, said: "I have already expressed my desire for an exclusive meeting with the U.S. official, instead of meeting her along with other MPs." His aide Abdus Sattar told "Dawn" that no response to the Maulana's request for a separate meeting had yet been received and it was difficult to say if he would meet her at all. Earlier on Tuesday the Maulana had told a private television channel that he would come to Islamabad only if an exclusive meeting was arranged. He wanted the meeting to be held in his parliament house chamber so that he could brief Ms Rocca on the political situation in Pakistan and in the region.... End quote.

5. "Rocca Refuses To Talk To Fazalur Rehman In His Chambers" "Islam" (05/26)

Quote: ... U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca will not meet Fazalur Rehman, the Opposition leader in his chambers. Fazalur Rehman had expressed apprehensions earlier on meeting with Rocca jointly with other parliamentary leaders. He opined that the presence of some pro-America elements in the parliamentary delegation could create an unpleasant situation during the meeting. So, he invited her at his chamber in the Parliament House. However, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad has regretted the invitation. According to the sources, the U.S. Embassy in some way had made contact with Fazalur Rehman, and requested him to see Rocca with the parliamentary delegation. Nevertheless, Ms. Christina Rocca refused to meet the Opposition leader at his Chamber.... End quote.

6. "SHC Issues Notice To U.S. Consulate In Kidnapping Case" "Dawn" (05/26)

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Quote: The Sindh High Court issued notice to the U.S. Consulate-General on Wednesday in a petition alleging kidnapping, confinement and beating up of a citizen by its personnel and seeking registration of a case against them. A division bench comprising Justices Sarmad Jalal Osmany and Azizullah M. Memon also asked Additional Advocate-General M. Ahmed Pirzada to submit comments on behalf of the official respondents, including the police authorities who mistreated the petitioner, Mirza Aslam Beg, after the consulate personnel handed him over to them and who later refused to register his first information report. The petitioner was on his way from his PECHS house to his Defense office on March 22 when his jeep slightly scratched a consulate vehicle. He was intercepted by the consulate staff in front of Awami Markaz, Shahrah-i-Faisal. He disclosed his identity and expressed his regrets but was manhandled and taken to the consulate building on Abdullah Haroon Road. The petitioner alleged that he was blindfolded, interrogated and beaten up at the consulate and later handed over to the Artillery Maidan police station where he was kept for another couple of hours. He was told by the police not to report the incident or move any court. When he approached the Baloch Colony police station in whose jurisdiction he was kidnapped, the SHO refused to register the case. He brought the matter to the police high-ups' notice but to no avail. Contesting the petition, the AAG questioned its maintainability. He said the consulate and its personnel enjoyed diplomatic immunity and could not be impleaded in a writ petition. The bench asked him to submit his comments in writing and issued the consulate-general a notice for June 1.... End quote.

7. "Christina Rocca's Breakfast With U.S. Embassy Employees; Hails Performance," "Ummat" (05/26)

Quote: Visiting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca on Wednesday had a breakfast meeting with the officials of the U.S. embassy in Islamabad and discussed diplomatic issues with them. She

praised the performance of Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and his team for propagating the U.S. policies and running the affairs of the embassy in a better way. End quote.

-- Desecration of the Holy Quran

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8. "U.S., Pakistan In Contact Regarding The Holy Quran Desecration" "Daily Times" (05/26)

Quote: Pakistan is in contact with the U.S. administration regarding the desecration of the Holy Quran in Guantanamo Bay, said Foreign Office spokesman Jalil Abbas Jilani. "We have been assured by the U.S. that a proper investigation will be carried out. We await a report of the investigation," he told Voice of America (VOA). The sacrilege of the Holy Quran was a shameless and condemnable act, he said. Jilani said Christina Rocca, U.S. Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs, would discuss bilateral issues with the government, including the war against terrorism and the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. End quote.

9. "Religious Leaders Blame Musharraf For The Holy Quran 'Desecration'" "Daily Times" (website) (05/26)

Quote: Leading religious leaders and clerics held President General Pervez Musharraf responsible for the desecration of the Holy Quran in Guantanamo Bay and urged the public to try to depose him. They demanded the government deport the U.S. Ambassador and visiting U.S. Assistant Secretary Christina Rocca, while addressing a 'Hurmat-e-Quran' conference held at Masjid-e-Shauhda on Wednesday. The conference was attended by a large number of activists, belonging to different religious groups. Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) President, said, "Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Pakistan Muslim League President, contacted me seeking invitation to attend the International Protest Day on May 27 against the desecration of the Holy Quran by U.S. soldiers, but I refused saying that he can only join our movement if he leaves Gen Musharraf's camp." Prof Hafiz Saeed, chief of the Jamaatud Dawa (formerly known as the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba), said it was shameful for the Pakistanis to see their government welcome those who desecrated the Holy Book. He said that Pakistan should recall its ambassador from the U.S. and deport the U.S. Ambassador.... End quote.

10. "Tomorrow Quran Bearing Protestors to Demonstrate in Every City, Town and Neighborhood: Speakers at Honor of Quran Convention" "Nawa-e-Waqt" (05/26)

Quote: Hurmat-e-Quran Convention has said that after the desecration of the Holy Quran at Guantanamo Bay, Pakistan should sever its diplomatic ties with America and if Ch. Shujaat Hussain, PML President, wants to

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participate in the May 27 international protest day proceeding then he should announced to sever ties with President Bush and America. The convention was held at Majlis-e-Shuhada and attended by Jamaatul Dawa Ameer Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, and Dr. Israr Ahmed.... End quote.

11. "MMA Demands Formal Apology From U.S." "The Nation" (05/26)

Quote: Central leader of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal MNA Liaquat Baloch has rejected clarification of U.S. Foreign Ministry and Newsweek about the desecration of Holy Quran by U.S. troops in Guantanamo Bay and demanded an formal apology by U.S. administration over the issue and punishment to the culprits. Addressing a Press conference at Al-Ikram Building on Wednesday after reviewing arrangements for May 27 international protest program against the desecration of Holy Quran by U.S. soldiers, he informed that Christians, Hindus and Sikhs would also attend the protest rallies in various cities. Giving details about the protest rallies in Pakistan, Liaquat Baloch said that Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Raja Zafarul Haq and Allama Sajid Naqvi would lead the rally in the Federal Capital; Prof. Sajid Mir and he himself would be leading the protest program in Lahore; Syed Munawar Hassan, Hafiz Hussain Ahmad and Maullana Samiul Haq in Karachi; Dr Muhammad Zubair, Maullana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, Maullana Muhammad Khan Sherani and Maullana Abdul Haq Baloch in Quetta, while Maullana Fazlur Rehman would lead the protest rally in Peshawar. By desecrating the Holy Quran in Guantanamo Bay prison the U.S. soldiers had violated both American Constitution and the United Nations Charter, Liaquat Baloch said and demanded trial of the culprits under war crimes. He rejected the clarification given in this regard by the United States and demanded an open apology by American administration from whole Muslim Ummah and exemplary punishment to the culprits.... End quote.

12. "The President Must Invite American and Other Non-Muslim Ambassadors to Protest Desecration of Holy Quran, Demand Religious and Political Leaders," "Din" (05/26)

Quote: Participants at a "Din" Forum demanded that President Musharraf must call all non-Muslim Ambassadors, including the U.S. Ambassador, and protest the desecration of the Holy Quran. Former Ambassador Mian Abdul Waheed said that the purpose behind the desecration was to harass detainees.... People's

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Party's Naveed Chaudhry said that MMA must not use this issue as a political lever... Ahle Hadith Allama Zubair Ahmad Zaheer said that we must protest all we want, but within the limits of decency. He said this incident could be a conspiracy also. He said I strongly believe that this was done by Jews, who want to cause a fight between us [Muslims] and Christians. End quote.

13. "Islam is a Great Religion; Muslims are not Terrorists; We Respect Quran Like we Respect the Bible; Desecration Was A Sad Incident: Lyall Grant," "Khabrain" (05/26)

Quote: British High Commissioner Mark Lyall Grant has said that Muslims wrongly believe that America, Britain and other European countries are conspiring against Islam and hatching plans to weaken it. He said Islam is a peaceful religion.... Talking at the Peshawar Press Club, he expressed concern over the desecration of the

Holy Quran by American soldiers and said that we respect the Quran just as we respect the Bible. The incident [of desecration] is sad. End quote.

14. "Desecration Incidents Took Place At the U.S. Interrogation Center in Kandahar Also," "Express" (05/26)

Quote: Talking with "Express" in Peshawar Jail, Mr. Rafiq - a detainee released from Guantanamo Bay -- said that desecration of the Holy Quran also took place at the U.S. interrogation center in Kandahar. End quote.

15. "U.S. Bases Be Removed From Country; Those Who Meet Christina Rocca Are Traitors Of The Country: Hafiz Saeed; America Must Hand Over Perpetrators Of Holy Quran's Desecration To Us, We Will Hang Them On Mall Road [Lahore]: Hurmat-I-Quran Convention," "Khabrain" (second lead, 05/26)

Quote: The Hurmat-e-Quran Convention in front of Lahore's Masjid-I-Shuhada attracted thousands of participants. The convention demanded that Pakistan break diplomatic relations with the U.S. over desecration of the Holy Quran, recall its Ambassador from the U.S. and send the American Ambassador out of the country. The convention reiterated that demonstrations against the desecration incident would be organized in all small and major cities of the country on May 27.... Qazi Hussain Ahmad said it has become

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imperative to oust Musharraf. End quote.

16. "No FBI Activity Should Be Allowed; In Sermons, Ulema Will Talk on the Greatness of the Holy Quran; All Links with America must be Severed: Resolutions Passed in the Hurmat-e-Quran Convention," "Khabrain" (05/26)

Quote: The Hurmat-e-Quran Convention passed 12 resolutions in its meeting in Lahore yesterday. The Convention, comprising all religious parties of the country, demanded that all relations with the U.S. must be severed. End quote.

17. "Two American Companies Publish False Quran," "Din" (05/26)

Quote: Two American publishing houses -- Omega 2001 and Wine Press -- have printed a false Quran titled "The True Furqan. It is 366-page long and contains 77 Surahs. It terms jihad as a crime. Instead of "Bismillah" every chapter in this Quran starts with a verse on the Christian Trinity. This book has been distributed in Kuwait, whereas the next target will be Pakistan, especially the English medium schools of the country. End quote.

18. "Another Incident Of Desecration Of The Holy Quran In U.S.," "Jang" (05/26)

Quote: Yet another incident of desecration of the Holy Quran in the United States has come to the fore and a priest allegedly involved in the incident has refused to tender apology. In the Forest City of North Carolina, a

Church has put up a board on the road inscribed with sacrilegious writings against the Quran. Meanwhile, the priest has tried to defend his action and said that he has only received one email against this board. End quote.

19. "Muslims Protest Over American Church Displaying 'Quran Should Be Flushed' Slogan" "Nawa-e-Waqt" (05/26)

Quote: Muslims rights group in America has strongly protested over a sacrilegious writing outside a Church that Quran should be flushed. The group demanded that people from all faiths demand removal of the anti-Muslim signboard. North Carolina, Forest City priest has refused to remove the signboard and said that he would not apologize. He said that he did not hate Muslims,

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but did hate their false beliefs. End quote.

20. "Many Incidents of Quran Desecration Occurred at Guantanamo Bay: FBI" "Nawa-e-Waqt" (05/26)

Quote: FBI has released the report on incidents of desecration of the Holy Quran at Guantanamo Bay. According to the report many prisoners said that American guards and interrogators had defiled The Quran. End quote.

-- Campaign Against Terrorism

21. "Religious Schools Are Involved In Recruiting The Misguided People: Rumsfeld" "Islam" (05/26)

Quote: ... Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S. Secretary of Defense has said that the U.S. could not win the war on terrorism without the help of others. Rumsfeld was talking to reporters in Philadelphia the other day. He said the new terrorists and their networks are emerging despite the success in the ongoing war against terrorism. 'The religious schools are still busy in engaging the misguided people around the globe. To find the new approaches to weaken the idea of fundamentalism and violence is important for a complete victory in this war', he added.... End quote.

22. "Libbi Giving Pakistan Information About Qaeda" "Daily Times" (05/26)

Quote: Abu Faraj al-Libbi, a senior Al-Qaeda leader recently captured in Pakistan, has given investigators vital information about the terrorist network, leading to several additional arrests, two security officials said on Wednesday. Al-Libbi, arrested in Pakistan on May 2, was believed to be the group's No3 leader. "He gave vital clues to investigators about the Al-Qaeda network, and our security forces were able to make more arrests on his information," one of the officials said on condition of anonymity. The second official, who also did not want to be named, confirmed that authorities had captured nearly a dozen terror suspects since al-Libbi was arrested following a shootout in the North-West Frontier Province. However, he said the additional suspects were not important catches. "A noose has been tightened around other Al-Qaeda men, and we expect more arrests," he said. The official declined to say whether al-Libbi had given any clues on the

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whereabouts of network leader Usama bin Laden or other senior terror suspects.... End quote.

23. "Multan: Al-Qaeda's Burqa-Clad Member Arrested," "Din" 905/26)

Quote: Intelligence agencies and Multan Police have arrested a burqa-clad man traveling on the Karachi-Multan Tezgam (train). He is said to be linked with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda leadership. End quote.

24. "Afghan Rulers Have Sold Their Country To America: Mullah Omer," "Ummat" (05/26)

Quote: Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omer has rejected the agreement of strategic relations between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and President Bush and said that the present Afghan leadership has sold out the country at the hands of America. In a statement issued from an undisclosed location, he said that the Afghan people would not accept any such agreement. End quote.

-- India-Pakistan Relations

25. "Political Sincerity Will Help Resolve Disputes" "Daily Times" (05/26)

Quote: Pakistan and India can overcome their political disputes with "political will and sincerity" and move towards mutually beneficial economic and trade cooperation, President Musharraf told a Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries delegation on Wednesday. Musharraf underscored the need to move forward on disputes resolution, saying, "We have to move forward on the political front effectively to resolve outstanding disputes and improve our relations rapidly." He hoped the two countries would not repeat mistakes by brushing underlying causes of tension under the carpet. He said, "Past accords between the countries failed as they did not address lingering disputes - let us not do it again." Referring to the Pakistan-India peace process, the president said he found Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sincere in his intentions, but added that Pakistan could not guarantee the same degree of harmony with future leaders.... End quote.

26. "Optimism As Siachen Talks Begin Today" "Dawn" (05/26)

Quote: India and Pakistan dialogue on the Siachen issue

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begins here on Thursday amid guarded optimism of some forward movement on the two-decade old conflict over the world's highest battlefield. This will be the ninth bilateral meeting on the Siachen issue and third under the composite dialogue framework agreed between the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries in 1997. Siachen is one of the eight issues on the composite dialogue agenda.... End quote.

27. "Invitation Accepted By APHC: Kashmiri Leaders Due On June 2, JKLF Undecided" "Dawn" (05/26)

Quote: Kashmir's spiritual leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said on Wednesday that he would travel to Azad Kashmir by bus on June 2 along with other leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference. "This is more a humanitarian need than a political issue," the Mirwaiz told Dawn from Srinagar. He said while four executive members of the APHC would travel with him, the names of some more delegates would be announced on Thursday.... The Mirwaiz described the Line of Control as not a line on the ground but one that tore the Kashmiri heart into two. "Our effort should be to narrow these distances, not as a political solution but a simple humanitarian gesture," he said.... End quote.

28. "India Has No Objection Over Travel Of Hurriyat Leaders To Pakistan," "Jang" (05/26)

Quote: Officials of the Indian Foreign Ministry have said that the Indian Government has no objection over the visit of the leaders of Hurriyat Conference to Pakistan but they would have to follow the normal travel procedures applied to the travel of Kashmiris in this regard. End quote.

29. "IPCC Seeks Easing Of Visa Curbs" "Dawn" (05/26)

Quote: Pakistan and India should develop sea, air and rail links besides easing visa restrictions that would greatly help promote bilateral trade. This was stated by the newly elected President of India-Pakistan Chamber of Commerce (IPCC) Onkar S. Kanwar while speaking at a ceremony organized by Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) here on Wednesday. Mr. Kanwar said the business community of the two countries was keen to go for joint ventures, adding that both governments should provide protection to their investments. He said both the governments during the recent visit of President Musharraf to India had

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recognized the IPCC, adding that this body would recommend developing sea, air and rail links for expansion of bilateral trade by reducing freight charges. He urged the governments of India and Pakistan to ease visa restrictions for genuine businessmen on the recommendations of IPCC, FPCCI and FICCI.... End quote.

30. "Pakistan-India Free Trade Can Cross \$6 Billion: IPCCI Chief" "The News" (05/26)

Quote: ... Newly elected President of India, Pakistan Chamber of Commerce (IPCCI) Onkar S. Kanwar stated this when a 100-member trade delegation of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), under his leadership, visited Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) here Wednesday.... In his welcome address, the ICCI president gave detailed briefing to the visiting delegation about trade potentials between the two countries. He said that import of Indian goods via third country was costing more to entrepreneurs and direct purchase would reduce this cost. Pakistan and India trade has jumped from \$161.02 million in 1999-2000 to \$476 million in 2003-04. But still the unofficial and through third-country trade level is of nearly \$2

billion, which needs to be brought into the organized sector. "The true potential is tremendous and if all barriers are removed it could cross \$6 billion within a year," he maintained.... End quote.

-- Iraq: Anti-Insurgent Offensives

31. "U.S.-Led Forces Kill 10 In Raid On Iraq Insurgents" "The Nation" (05/26)

Quote: About 1,000 U.S. and Iraqi troops launched a new raid against insurgents Wednesday, killing 10 suspects including a Muslim cleric, after reports Iraq's most wanted man, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had been wounded. Clashes erupted in Haditha after 1,000 U.S. and Iraqi troops moved into the Euphrates river city to track down insurgents who the military said had escaped an operation earlier this month near the border with Syria. "Six insurgents were killed in the battle and two marines were reported wounded," the U.S. military said. "Local citizens identified one of the attackers killed as an imam (who) was firing ... an AK-47 assault rifle." Four more insurgents were killed in other clashes in the area, it said, adding that checkpoints have been set up around the city, some 260 kilometers (160 miles)

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northwest of the capital, to prevent insurgents fleeing.
End quote.

-- Iran: Nuclear Program

32. "U.S. Pressure Is Obstacle To EU-Iran Nuclear Deal:
Iranian Negotiator" "The Nation" (05/26)

Quote: An Iranian negotiator warned Wednesday that U.S. pressure was an obstacle to reaching an agreement between EU countries and Iran over Tehran's controversial nuclear program during talks in Geneva. "The Europeans want to find a solution, but their room for maneuver is restricted because of their transatlantic political ties," Iranian negotiator Cyrus Nasserli told AFP. End quote.

33. "Iran's Nuclear Program Must Be Stopped At All
Costs: Asselborn" "The Nation" (05/26)

Quote: The world community must "do everything" to stop Iran from one day gaining access to nuclear weapons, Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn, whose country currently holds the EU presidency, said on Wednesday. "Everything must be done to avoid having a new country in this very precarious region of the world acquiring a nuclear bomb," Asselborn told reporters on the sidelines of a Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council Security Forum meeting in the central Swedish town of Aare. His comments came on the same day as the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany were to meet with Iran's top negotiator Hassan Rowhani in Geneva for crucial talks aimed at avoiding an escalation of Tehran's standoff with the West over its nuclear program. Iran has described those talks as a "last-ditch meeting" to avoid referring Iran to the UN Security Council -- and into Washington's diplomatic line of fire -- if the talks fail. "We really want to

cooperate with Iran," Asselborn said, insisting however that if Tehran violates accords signed in Paris last November, "it is obvious that this will have consequences". After the Paris talks, Iran agreed to suspend "temporarily" its uranium enrichment activities in exchange for talks with the European Union on nuclear, technological and commercial cooperation. End quote.

34. "EU-Iran Nuclear Talks In Geneva Risk Deadlock:
Iranian Negotiator" "The Nation" (05/26)

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Quote: The foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany meet here on Wednesday with Iran's top negotiator Hassan Rowhani for crucial talks aimed at avoiding an escalation of Tehran's standoff with the West on its nuclear program after Iran warned there was a high risk of deadlock. "The talks between (Iranian and European) experts have been difficult and complicated, they haven't been promising and if they go on like this, the risk of a deadlock in the negotiations Wednesday is high," said Ali Agha Mohammadi, one of the Iranian negotiators currently in Geneva. He was speaking to AFP after official-level talks in Brussels to prepare for the formal negotiations in Geneva between the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany and Rowhani. Iran has described the meeting in the Swiss city as a "last-ditch meeting" to avoid referring Iran to the UN Security Council -- and into Washington's diplomatic line of fire -- if the talks fail. End quote.

-- Pakistan Political Situation

35. "Cases Against Benazir Not To Be Withdrawn; Nawaz Not To Issued Passport: Federal Minister For Information," "Jang" (05/26)

Quote: Federal Minister for Information Sheikh Rashid Ahmad has said that the Cabinet has decided not to withdraw any case against former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Ali Zardari, nor the government would issue a fresh passport to the exiled former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He said that the Cabinet also condemned the desecration of the Holy Quran by the U.S. troops. End quote.

Editorials/Opinions: Watch list Items

-- Desecration of the Holy Quran

36. "American Credibility Crisis," an editorial in the centrist national English daily, "The News" (05/26)

Quote: American officials will have to work overtime to manage the public-relations crisis they face around the world, which aggravated after the front-page publication by the British tabloid The Sun of Saddam Hussein's picture in his underpants. Other photographs showed

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Saddam, with short, dyed-black hair and a moustache, washing clothes by hand, and asleep on his bed. This

followed the reported desecration of the Holy Quran at Guantanamo Bay by American guards deputed to extract information from the prisoners in cages. The unfortunate incident stirred riots in Muslim countries, leaving around 20 dead in Afghanistan alone. Reports of abuse and torture in custody by Americans have already become a regular matter. There seems to be a clear pattern of cruelty and mistreatment of people under U.S. custody. The pictures were leaked as a strategy, as suggested by the tabloid, which quoted American officials, to deal a body blow to the resistance in Iraq. A U.S. military statement officially denied this, saying the pictures might be a year old, but that they contravened Saddam Hussein's rights as a prisoner and could have broken the Geneva Conventions. However, amid a credibility crisis that is deepening, the explanations may not be enough to persuade people that the Americans are telling the truth. Those in the Arab states will be harder to convince. The feeling of helplessness is fast turning into anger, which is now manifesting itself in violent forms. Even sections of society, particularly in the Arab world, which were earlier complacent at the American presence in the region, are realigning their positions. But this is essentially what the Americans have earned for themselves. They must now think of ways to improve their country's image and raise its credibility among people in whose name they are fighting their war for universal freedoms and liberty. It must not stop at taking some action here and there for such abuses, which, considering their frequency, appear to be systemic and institutionalized. The U.S. needs to bring about reforms at the institutional level in order for its soldiers to abide by the international law and the global protocols that on the rights of prisoners as well as rules of war. End quote.

-- Afghanistan: Security and Reconstruction/Drug Trade

37. "Afghanistan: Wrong Emphasis," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily, "Dawn" (05/26)

Quote: President George Bush and President Hamid Karzai might have agreed to have a strategic partnership between their two countries, but their meeting in Washington on Monday did not exactly take place in a very congenial atmosphere. The visit was preceded by

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two most unpleasant incidents - violent protests by Afghans against the desecration of the Holy Quran in Guantanamo and reports about the torture and death of two Afghan suspects at the American air base at Bagram.... President Bush, too, had his own complaints to make when he met Mr. Karzai for the first time after the latter was elected president last October. The most important of America's complaints is the phenomenal rise in poppy cultivation. Whatever else the Taliban might have been, they were hard on narcotics, for they had succeeded in virtually eradicating poppy cultivation and the manufacture and smuggling of heroin.... While the American complaint on this issue may be justified, Washington has put too much emphasis on a military solution to Afghanistan's problems. At present, there are 18,000 U.S. troops there, and 80 per cent of

America's annual \$15 billion spending goes to the military. Yet violence is on the rise, as seen in the recent kidnapping of foreign aid workers and the attacks on security forces by the Taliban. Post-war reconstruction seems to have taken a back seat. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force has confined its activity to Kabul and Kunduz, leaving the rest of the country open to lawlessness. During his recent visit to Brussels, President Karzai pleaded for more European troops. It would be better if Kabul and its friends put more emphasis on economic reconstruction.... End quote. Crocker

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